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Africa's passive revolution: crisis in Malawi

Andrew Brooks and Alex Loftus

Recent protest movements in sub-Saharan Africa have generally failed to effect progressive transformations. Efforts to achieve social change have been frustrated by governing elites that continue to utilise their vacillating and unequal relationships with the external environment to sustain power. Although the leading figures may change, the dominant African class can re-establish leadership through new alliances with domestic and international networks of capital. To understand such 'change-without-change', this paper contributes to the growing body of literature on Antonio Gramsci's development of 'passive revolution'. The comparative character of Gramscian analysis enables his philosophy of praxis to be translated into very different historical and geographical settings. With this in mind we draw together recent engagements with passive revolution from Geography, Politics and African Studies. In particular we develop Jean-François Bayart's notion of extraversion, while considering it in relation to more recent philological engagements with Gramsci. Our empirical focus is the politics of transition in Malawi. In his second term in office, the autocratic and unpopular president, Bingu wa Mutharika, implemented economic policies that ran against neoliberal orthodoxy and suppressed protest during a period of crisis. Mutharika was replaced, following his death in 2012, by Joyce Banda, a previously marginalised vice-president, who nurtured a re-engagement with transnational capital. Working through the state, Banda led a transformation from on high and moved to impose new economically liberal policies, including a major currency devaluation, which reduced living standards for many. We draw our empirical material from Chancellor College, a major site of protest against Mutharika in 2011. Evidence from interviews with staff and students demonstrates how two episodes of revolution/restoration in Malawi, a country distant from the western historical experience, can be interpreted through Gramsci's socially differentiated understanding of politics.

Key words Africa; crisis; Gramsci; Malawi; passive revolution

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Introduction

If the uprisings of 2011 briefly kindled a sense of the possibilities for social change in many parts of the world, where regimes had previously appeared ossified or intransigent, they left sub-Saharan Africa devoid of any such optimism. Whether or not the African continent is best understood as part of a continuing tragedy, as Colin Leys (1994) once suggested, few have, in recent years, detected any real sign of a transformation of social and political relations from below (Seddon and Zeilig 2005). Indeed, notwithstanding the 'popcorn protests' across South Africa and elsewhere, what seems more important to capture is how social change is continually frustrated: governing elites are able to ensure 'democratisation', 'good governance' or a post-apartheid dispensation without fundamental political or social change (Mottiar 2013). Few concepts have the power to capture this 'change-without-change' as effectively as Antonio Gramsci's development of 'passive revolution'. Although, as Hart (2013, 214)

notes, Gramsci is often wrongly referred to as a Western Marxist, he was deeply attentive to the articulation of historically and spatially uneven processes of development. This attentiveness to difference ensures that his work is unusually pertinent in considering the 'relations of force' in a wide range of different contexts. Indeed, Gramsci's oeuvre has a profoundly comparative character that enables the further translation of concepts such as passive revolution, ensuring they can do analytical work in very different historical and geographical settings. Thus, we build on recent writings on passive revolution (Bayart 1993; Hart 2013; Morton 2013) in our analysis of processes of revolution/restoration in Malawi. Two episodes are explored: Malawi's state-led partial disengagement from the external economy in 2009–12, and the subsequent transition between Presidents Bingu wa Mutharika and Joyce Banda.

Bingu wa Mutharika governed Malawi between 2004 and 2012. In the latter half of this period, his leadership was marked by anti-Western rhetoric and an

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increasingly authoritarian form (Cammack 2012). Following re-election in 2009, Mutharika's economic policies ran against neoliberal orthodoxy: Malawi did not follow good governance policy prescriptions, the national currency was overvalued, foreign businesses were expelled and subsidies were provided to farmers. Very rapidly, the disciplining effects of global markets sparked a period of crisis that coincided with the Arab Spring and what appeared to be major successes for popular movements elsewhere in the world. Building on the window of opportunity that presented itself, a fledgling opposition briefly emerged among urban-based human rights NGOs, and staff and students at Chancellor College in Zomba, the largest college of the University of Malawi. The opposition was not without its own internal contradictions and was quelled by Mutharika. However, to paraphrase William Morris, change came about in spite of the movement's suppression when, on 5 April 2012, the President died of a heart attack. Joyce Banda, the formerly disenfranchised vice-President, assumed power, quickly becoming a 'darling' of the global North (Mwale 2014). One of Banda's key changes was to implement a currency devaluation that had been called for by the donor community (Cammack 2012). This devaluation – celebrated by some Malawians and widely praised internationally as a progressive step for the country – had devastating consequences for the livelihoods of many. Small salary increases in no way matched the dramatic inflation in prices (CfSC 2012) witnessed within the country. Through a series of interviews with staff and students at Chancellor College, we chart the changes that took place within the Malawian state form. Initially turning to the resurgence of writings on Gramsci's philosophy of praxis, we then consider how the concept of passive revolution has led to new readings of African political realities. In the latter half of the paper we turn to the processes through which Mutharika practised what Bayart (1993) refers to as extraversion, through a partial disengagement from international capital flows. Although we have some reservations over the manner in which Bayart reads the socio-spatial dynamics of passive revolution, we see great potential in a dialogue with more recent philological (Thomas 2009a) and geographical engagements with the concept (Hart 2013). The ambitious sweep of Bayart's work, although sometimes conceptually loose, enables an understanding of broader postcolonial transitions developing across the African continent. As part of a larger project we intend to expand this dialogue within and beyond geography in order to read Africa's contemporary passive revolutions. We then look at how the transition from Mutharika to Banda was enacted, drawing extensively from the interviews at Chancellor College before concluding by reasserting the need to translate passive revolution to other times and places.

Passive revolution: translating Gramsci into African realities

Interest in Antonio Gramsci's philosophy of praxis has grown exponentially within the Anglophone world over the last decade (Ekers *et al.* 2013; Green 2011; Morton 2007; Thomas 2009a) prompting a revitalisation of Marxism. Shaped in large part by the availability of Gramsci's *Prison notebooks* in full editions – as opposed to selective thematic editions – in several different languages, this latest wave of Gramsci scholarship has been spearheaded by more philological approaches that pay far closer attention to the development of concepts within the notebooks, eschewing some earlier claims about the fragmentary, disjointed or episodic character of the texts (Thomas 2009a). Easily the most lauded of these new engagements has been Peter Thomas's *The Gramscian moment* (2009a), which draws from un-translated Italian and German debates, while embarking on a painstaking philological reading of Gramsci's overall philosophy of praxis.

Such philological approaches have, nevertheless, not been without their critics. In spite of Thomas's call to renew 'an organic relationship between leftist theory and forms of organization ... that today compose ... the "subaltern social groups"' (2009b, 34), his reference points are almost always historical rather than contemporary. Others have therefore sought to do as Thomas suggests, renewing this 'organic relationship' through meeting Gramsci's challenge to 'translate' the philosophy of praxis within a wide variety of different contexts. Two of the finest examples of such 'translations' are Adam Morton's (2011) reading of passive revolution within the Mexican state form and Gillian Hart's (2013) interpretation of passive revolution as a process of de-nationalisation and re-nationalisation within South Africa. Indeed, alongside Hart, several other geographers have developed the philosophy of praxis in a range of quite different contexts (Gidwani and Paudel 2013; Nash 2013). One of the challenges for such scholarship is how to retain the close philological reading that has transformed Gramscian scholarship in recent years, while developing an approach that is equally attentive to emergent processes. Unsurprisingly, new readings of passive revolution, positioned in relation to Gramsci's overall philosophy of praxis, have enabled such an approach to flourish (Morton 2010).

Perhaps there is a certain irony that a concept initially developed to make sense of the specificities of the Italian historical experience should be taken to understand the historical geographies of such a range of different places. Nevertheless, as the Brazilian scholar Carlos Nelson Coutinho suggests, the extension of the concept to a range of different historical and geographical moments is 'methodologically authorized by Gramsci himself, since he was the first to extend the

notion of passive revolution to whole different historical periods' (2012, 101). Indeed, following the development of passive revolution as a means through which he can gain an understanding of the Italian *Risorgimento*, Gramsci later uses the concept to describe a more general historical period, before using passive revolution as part of a comparative method. In what follows, we will detail these different usages, before turning to how this interpretative method has been developed in recent writings focusing on African contexts, enabling a consideration of how passive revolution might 'travel' to a Malawian context.

Gramsci takes the expression passive revolution from the historian Vincenzo Cuoco (Gramsci Q19 §24; 1971, 59) who described, in 1799, the failure of the Neapolitan revolution; nevertheless, Gramsci 'uses the expression of Cuoco's in a slightly different sense from that which Cuoco intended' (Q19 §24; 1971, 59) in order to understand the peculiar process of bourgeois state formation that Italy experienced throughout the 19th century. The period known as the *Risorgimento* saw the political unification of the fragmented political geography of different states of Italy under a single state form. The peculiarities of the Italian situation for Gramsci existed in the type of "revolution" without a "revolution" (Q19 §24; 1971, 59). The potential 'Jacobins', those who in the French context had made the revolution so successful, failed in Italy, as the demands of the *Partito d'Azione* came to be absorbed and accommodated within the political programme of the 'Moderates'. In contrast, in France the Jacobins represented both the needs and aspirations of the bourgeoisie and the revolutionary movements as a whole (Q19 §24; 1971, 78).

With the crucial Jacobin element lacking in the Italian context, the *Risorgimento* came to be defined through the process of *transformism*: the simultaneous absorption of the Action Party into the Moderates; and the 'decapitation', as opposed to absorption, of the masses in relation to the new State (Q19, §26; 1971, 98). The *Risorgimento* thus became a peculiar combination of 'revolution/restoration' (Gramsci Q15, §11; 1971, 109). As Peter Thomas writes,

It was a transformation of political forms undertaken by elites, garbed in the rhetoric of previous revolutionary movements, but without the extensive involvement of subaltern classes that had led to the placing in question of social and economic relations in earlier transformations. (2006, 72)

Thomas goes on to note how it quickly became clear to Gramsci that the concept of passive revolution had a more general applicability in other contexts where states had made a transition to modernity without popular participation from below. Indeed, passive revolution can be understood as the specific route to modernity taken by a range of European nation states (2006, 72), Bismarckian Germany being among the

most prominent. Further extending the concept (for criticism see Callinicos 2010), Gramsci goes on to view passive revolution as a description of a much more expansive historical *period* in Europe.

Coutinho (2012) claims that the key features of passive revolution are, therefore (a) the strengthening of the state in relation to civil society and (b) the process of co-optation of elements from below through the practice of *transformism*. Thus, even if leadership is enacted more through state forms, when understood through the delicate balance between consent and coercion, consensual forms of leadership are never absent within passive revolution. Nor, as the above makes clear, should the concept of passive revolution imply a true passivity. Indeed, as Morton writes, 'the process is not therefore literally "passive" but refers to the attempt at "revolution" through state intervention' (2007, 64). It simultaneously involves 'the inclusion of new social groups within the hegemony of a political order without an expansion of mass-producer control over politics' (2007, 64). Thus, the state replaces local social groups in leading a process of revolution/restoration. As will be seen, both Mutharika and Banda developed such transformist strategies in a variety of different ways from the former's attempt to construct shared moral and cultural values to the latter's co-optation of some of the forces for change in the immediate period after her resumption of power.

Having established that Gramsci invites an extension of the concept of passive revolution through his own method, Coutinho (2012) goes on to develop a relational understanding of the state form within Brazil. Coutinho's approach here accords with other efforts to extend passive revolution *not* through the amassing of various 'case studies' but through a careful method of relational comparison as in the work of Hart (2002). Tugal (2009) has therefore developed passive revolution to understand the absorption of Islam within the state form of Turkey, enabling related understandings of both Egypt and Iran; Chatterjee has used the concept, albeit in a slightly confusing fashion, to capture 'the nationalist marriage of progress in social justice' (1986, 132) within Nehru's vision for India; Morton (2007 2011) has developed passive revolution in a Mexican context; Hesketh and Morton (2014) have, more recently, analysed emergent class strategies of passive revolution within a Bolivian context; and in South Africa, Hart (2013) has extended her method of relational comparison to analyse the specific form that passive revolution has taken.

Although the range of analyses of passive revolution suggest a real fecundity to the concept, Alex Callinicos notes that passive revolution suffers from 'a chronic problem of over-extension' (2010, 492) within the notebooks themselves (covering everything from the *Risorgimento* to Italian Fascism, Americanism and

Fordism), and a worsening over-extension in the proliferation of secondary analyses. While recognising that the concept can be used to describe a set of 'socio-political processes in which revolution inducing strains are at once displaced and partially fulfilled' (2010, 492), Callinicos cautions against the overenthusiastic application of a concept in such a variety of different contexts. Morton (2010) responds with a forceful defence of recent approaches, emphasising above all the need to *translate* passive revolution across a variety of differing historical and geographical conditions that are always understood relationally. The emphasis on 'translation' emerges in part from an acknowledgement of the importance of Gramsci's linguistic training to the development of his philosophy of praxis (see Ives 2004; Boothman 2010; Ives and Lacorte 2010) and of Gramsci's linguistically inspired response to Lenin's comment that the Russian Revolution had not yet been able to 'translate' its language into those of Western Europe (Gramsci Q11, §46; 1995, 306; Thomas 2009b, 29). This response consisted of a detailed reconnaissance of the specific conditions through which a revolutionary social transformation might be possible within the 'West'. Indeed the 'guiding thread that organizes all of Gramsci's carceral research' (Thomas 2009a, 136) can be understood in terms of this need for translatability in the context of the specific conditions generated by passive revolution: it 'can be succinctly characterized as *the search for an adequate theory of proletarian hegemony in the epoch of the "organic crisis" or the "passive revolution" of the bourgeois "integral State"*' (2009a, 136, emphasis in original; Coutinho (2012, 50) makes a very similar point). Translation becomes crucial to this search for an adequate theory. It requires, as Kipfer and Hart note, both a fidelity to the key coordinates of Gramsci's philosophy of praxis as well as 'moving beyond Gramsci today', an act that involves elements of betrayal 'in the spirit of translation as Gramsci conceived and practiced it' (2013, 331). Against an austere historicism, such an act of translation requires patient attention to the absolute historicism that was so central to Gramsci's overall philosophy of praxis (Morton 2007) and an approach that is rooted within and also *against* the Prison Notebooks. Recognising the partiality of the notebooks further reinforces the need for translation across different registers. In responding to this need, passive revolution becomes for Hart (2013) a vital 'criterion of interpretation' that can be extended to other contexts. It is necessary to revisit passive revolution as 'a profoundly spatio-historical concept that calls for relational forms of comparison' while simultaneously re-emphasising its profoundly dialectical character, and acknowledging its close connections with both the philosophy of praxis and with Fanon's struggle for a new humanism (Hart 2013, 222). Thus, passive revolution must be

attentive to specificities as well as to interconnections; to the ongoing reverberations of colonial histories and changing forms of imperialism; and to the constitutive articulations of race, ethnicity, gender and sexuality with class nationalisms. (Hart 2013, 224)

We seek to build on the work of Hart (2013), Morton (2011) and others in our own efforts to translate Malawi's passive revolution. In so doing, we seek to provide further illustration of how passive revolution has unfolded in an African context. The Malawian study will therefore become part of a larger project of translating Africa's passive revolutions over the 20th and 21st centuries.

In contextualising more recent efforts to interpret Africa's passive revolution, of which we see this paper as one contribution, it is important to consider the earlier reading of Jean-François Bayart. Writing over two decades before Hart's analysis of South Africa's ongoing passive revolution, Bayart (1993) applied the same 'criterion of interpretation' to the historical sociology of the postcolonial African state. For Bayart (1993), African societies lack three groups that are traditionally ascribed a leading role in Eurocentric analyses: landowners are historically absent; the peasantry is a fragmented class; and the industrial working class is very limited in size. Throughout the development of capitalism across the continent, political society and capital have therefore been unable to intensify the exploitation of their dependents: nevertheless, political and economic elites have proliferated and flourished (Harrison 2010; Hirschmann 1990). Writing against what he perceives to be 'structuralist weaknesses' of dependency theory, Bayart therefore emphasises the manner in which African innovations have overcome the weak productive forces and bitterness of internal social struggles to enable accumulation by national ruling classes (Bayart 1993). Central to Bayart's translation of passive revolution is the concept of 'extraversion'. Extraversion acknowledges the differing ways in which elites mobilise resources that can be accrued through unequal relationships with donors, corporations and multi-lateral agencies. Thus, although African states' relationships with external powers are unequal, they are not static and have long provided room for manoeuvre for local ruling classes. African leaders have therefore domesticated colonial institutions and appropriated post-colonial practices, sometimes opposing dependency while at other moments facilitating external domination. Importantly extraversion can involve neopatrimonialism, and patrons may use state resources to reinforce social hierarchies in order to secure the loyalty of their clients, but extraversion is not restricted to patronage and also encompasses other political acts that can disrupt existing social hierarchies. Rulers can manoeuvre to enhance their position vis-à-vis global capital while

marginalising local actors. Classifying such leaders as either nationalists who serve local clients or as collaborators with international elites thereby fails to capture the manner in which internal societal forms are actively shaped through domestic leaders' relations with external environments.

The origin and sustained power of the African elite within the postcolonial state can be explained through Gramsci's understanding of politics:

[T]he concept of passive revolution is extremely useful for it synthesises the 'educated' people's rise to power, their seizure of State resources, and their refusal to enhance and radicalise popular movements against colonialism. And even better, Gramsci's concept explains the process whereby the 'educated' group reached an understanding with those who held power previously, and how this process was reproduced on a larger scale. (Bayart 1993, 181)

Crucially, the 'understanding' reached with former colonisers does not mean a straightforward continuation of collaboration in the mode of neo-colonialism, as might have been argued by dependency theorists. Dominant groups in Africa are active agents in the making of their histories, working to extract rent from their position as intermediaries vis-à-vis the international system, gaining revenues from agricultural levies, natural resource extraction, consumer imports, foreign investments and development aid – frequently to the exasperation of external elites (Bond 2006). Colonisation enabled extraversion by providing opportunities for accumulation to the direct benefit of some Africans. During the colonial period, existing African political formations took advantage of European occupations to strengthen or protect regional power, as some factions gained power and wealth at the expenses of others thanks to foreign support (Davidson 1994). Cooperation was ambivalent and mediated by misunderstanding, as much as the local social context of African politics is misunderstood today (Biruk 2014). Thus, Bayart convincingly argues that the narrow neo-colonial perspective diminishes the role of indigenous participants, framing them as mere handmaidens to foreign power:

African governments exploit, occasionally skilfully, the resources of a dependence which is, it cannot ever be sufficiently stressed, astutely fabricated as much as predetermined. Both on their political stage and within the world system, they pursue their own objectives, within the margins of failure and success that the implementation of any strategy entails. (1993, 26)

Inequality has been sustained and capitalist development curtailed because of the strength of the political settlement in post-colonial states. In the years following formal decolonisation across Africa, *Assimilados* in former Portuguese colonies, BEE (Black Economic Empowerment) elites in South Africa,

Evoules in the Francophone West and foreign-educated upper classes everywhere gladly engaged in accumulative power (Bayart 1993; Hart 2013). Revolutionaries and young ideologues become reactionaries, happily participating as privileged members of a small class that has further gained from the 'neoliberalisation' of Africa (Harrison 2010). In a process of 'transformism', Western-educated African state bureaucrats work with policy advisors and economic managers from the international financial institutions and donor community to 'fix' problems such as inflation, unemployment and demand (Sylvester 1990, 458). However unlikely it is that such 'fixes' will correct social problems, intellectuals, as in the *Risorgimento*, are absorbed into governing elites and potential opposition is diminished. Thus, today, the most influential elites are defined by their relationships to the IMF, World Bank and the former metropolises, even as these developmental actors are themselves being challenged through the sourcing of investment from China and other emergent powers.

Such a pattern of passive revolution can be seen during times of organic crisis when the national bourgeoisie is too weak to establish hegemony in the sense of an ideological bond between itself and other social groups that would enable a consolidation of power. An organic crisis is 'the moment when the bourgeoisie's claims to universality, to advance the common good, were revealed to be in the service of particularist [sic] interests, namely, the accumulation of capital in the hands of the ruling class' (Thomas 2009a, 145), and it provides a window of opportunity for subordinate groups to build a movement capable of challenging the existing order. However, if this opportunity is not taken, the balance of power will shift back to the dominant class, which can survive and re-establish its leadership through new alliances, often co-opting former members of the opposition and projecting a new or altered capitalist trajectory (Sylvester 1990). Individuals claiming to speak for subordinate classes are thereby incorporated into elite networks (Hart 2013). In such moments, passive revolution enables us to understand 'how one part of the bourgeoisie gathers the rest of the class around itself' (Bayart 1993, 182) without achieving the Jacobin moment referred to earlier. The vulnerability of the livelihoods of the majority and a lack of class consolidation are barriers to popular engagement with radical politics, but, just as importantly, 'the subaltern classes are held in a passive position because their potential leadership is co-opted' (Adamson 1980, 175).

Gramscian scholarship has not previously interrogated the political history of Malawi, but empirical studies of neighbouring Zimbabwe illustrate how passive revolution might elucidate political shifts. Sylvester (1990) identifies two episodes of passive revolution in Zimbabwe and more recently Raftopoulos (2010) has

identified a third moment. The first was led by the White ruling classes, who consolidated power between the end of the Second World War and Zimbabwean independence in 1979. The second episode erupted within the nationalist movement. Zimbabwean parties inadvertently mirrored the Rhodesian state they had sought to defeat. Through the accumulation and consolidation of power by Robert Mugabe, opposition was co-opted into government and discontent smashed. First in 1980 Mugabe's ZANU party merged with the opposition Patriotic Front, forming ZANU-PF, then in 1987 the opposition ZAPU was absorbed into ZANU-PF. Following this success, Mugabe established a fragile hegemony while simultaneously isolating Zimbabwe from the global economy through the late 1990s. With the ensuing crisis in the 2000s, Mugabe's authority appeared to wane: nevertheless, in one of the most remarkable turnarounds, Mugabe further consolidated his rule through drawing the MDC into a power-sharing agreement in 2008. Raftopoulos (2010) unsurprisingly cites this neutralisation of the MDC as yet another episode of passive revolution.

Some similar processes can be witnessed in the Malawian case, although there are also profound differences. Thus, in seeking to better understand the process of transformism through which passive revolution has been enacted in Malawi, we focused our fieldwork on the local intellectual class that operated outside of the ruling elite and without direct association with Malawian civil society organisations. Empirical material comes from 26 in-depth interviews carried out in January–February 2013 with staff and students at Chancellor College, Zomba, a key site of struggle during the developing organic crisis (Cammack 2012). University staff and students constitute part of the terrain of civil society that in a Gramscian sense is part of the differentiated unity comprising the 'integral state'. Extensive use is made of quotations from the interviews to explain how opposition to the Bingu wa Mutharika regime was articulated at the College, thereby illustrating how civil society served as one of several terrains over which a passive revolution was enacted. Research participants were approached on the Chancellor College campus in Zomba using random stratified sampling, a strategy approached with a degree of caution given that dismissals and arrests had ensued following recent protests. We were careful in explaining what the interview process involved and, due to practical constraints and the time-consuming process of engaging participants in the research, the sample size was constrained. Anonymised interviewees include senior academics, lecturers and technicians, who make up half the sample, as well as all levels of students, some of whom had been involved in protests and others who had not. We used a purposeful sample with equal gender distribution and ensured representation of a

variety of academic disciplines. Staff voices were just as important as students, some were active in articulating discontent, whereas others were not. The core themes explored in the interviews were: perceptions of Mutharika's presidency pre-2009; the crisis of 2009–2011; the protests at Chancellor College; reactions to Mutharika's death and the ascendancy of Banda to the presidency; and the perceptions of Banda's presidency and policies, including the crucial currency devaluation. Interviews were undertaken rather than focus groups or questionnaires to help maintain anonymity for participants as the research themes covered highly contentious issues. To further ensure anonymity, we have also chosen to minimise detail provided on individual participants.

Malawi 2009–12: an emerging organic crisis

Malawian President Bingu wa Mutharika enjoyed a successful first term (2004–9) in office. Economic growth was around 8 per cent per annum and agriculture performed impressively (Gabay 2014). Government fertiliser subsidies helped boost farmers' incomes and addressed the issue of food security, a longstanding development challenge for Malawi (Dionne and Dulani 2013). Tobacco, the major export cash crop, flourished and surplus maize was exported to Zimbabwe. In 2009 Mutharika stood for re-election. Facing no credible opposition, he won a landslide victory, gaining an absolute majority in the presidential election as well as for his DPP (Democratic People's Party) in parliament. Although given a powerful mandate, economic success and Mutharika's popularity did not last: the seeds for an organic crisis appeared to be sown. Mutharika therefore sought to enhance his authority by embedding himself and his allies in power while pursuing a new economic and political programme that sought to establish some autonomy from the international economy.

A new Minister of Finance, Ken Kandodo, was appointed in 2009. As a more 'compliant' and less independent Minister, it appeared that he would follow Mutharika's economic programme better than his predecessor in the first term (2004–9), Goodall Gondwe, who had served in the IMF for 22 years (Cammack 2011). The government thus implemented new fiscal policies, attempting to stabilise the Malawian Kwacha against the US Dollar, and renewing price controls and fertiliser subsidies, against IMF advice. Minimum-price rules were enforced in the tobacco sector and four leading expatriate buyers were expelled from Malawi, being labelled 'exploitative colonialists' by Mutharika for not adhering to price controls (BBC 2009). As well as demonstrating some autonomy of action, Mutharika's was a populist move, aiming to

appeal to farmers facing difficulties at a time when the global tobacco sector had slumped after the global financial crisis. Poor performance in the tobacco sector, which accounts for over 75 per cent of Malawi's export earnings, then contributed to a national economic crisis. By 2010 many considered the Kwacha to be overvalued by 10–20 per cent, and a parallel market in foreign exchange had emerged. A mini devaluation was implemented in late 2011, but the disparity grew to 80 per cent by early 2012. At this point, the IMF turned off credit and demanded that the Kwacha be devalued by 40 per cent; however, Mutharika's government ignored this advice and continued to borrow to pay bills. Foreign investment fell and businesses contracted, as a financial crisis deepened and a lack of foreign exchange led to shortages of consumer goods, price increases and inflation, which eventually reached 9.8 per cent (Cammack 2012).

The donor community was supportive during Mutharika's first term, including, perhaps surprisingly, backing his fertiliser subsidies programme (Sachs 2012). However, political elites within Malawi became embroiled in a fierce battle with international financial organisations as the former opposed further liberalisation and external interference. In response, donors cut funding when Mutharika delayed decentralisation and other liberal reforms (Cammack 2011). The exasperated Ambassador and Head of Delegation of the European Union, Alexander Baum set out in a public statement that Malawi needed reform:

one does not have to be an economic genius to conclude that what the country needs is a diversification of its export base as well as liberalisation of its trade regime. (2011, 2)

Mutharika, however, appeared to disagree. Instead, his neo-patrimonial 'developmental' vision for Malawi stemmed from the 1970s, favouring mega-project-led modernisation with some degree of autonomy of action (Cammack 2011 2012). The ruling regime reflected this vision and operated according to its own rationalities of patronage, grandeur and reciprocity (Bayart 1993). Ministers, including the President's brother, Peter Mutharika, benefited from this patronage (Cammack *et al.* 2010). Malawi continued to interact with the external environment, but did not reproduce the governmental rationalities promoted by the liberal 'good governance' discourse of the IMF, World Bank and aid donors. International donors therefore withdrew essential large-scale budget support in response to the economic policies. Imports declined, petrol stations ran dry and the price of transport increased, while food deliveries were held up, pushing the economy further into decline. In the main cities of Blantyre and Lilongwe, the population endured electricity blackouts and drug shortages in the hospitals. All groups suffered, but particularly the middle class.

In 2009, Mutharika did not fully withdraw Malawi from the global economy, but attempted to forge a slightly different path that involved putting forward a new vision for the nation. In so doing, he attempted to modify how Malawi interacted with international capital, through, for instance, tobacco price-setting. He also took a role in negotiating contracts either personally or through close contacts, enabling rent extraction (Cammack *et al.* 2010) and a tighter grip on power built on a close circle of allies who benefited from patronage, and through appealing to a broad constituency through new social and cultural policies. Bayart (1993) pays particular attention to the symbolic political value of imported luxuries within extraversion. As Malawi's relationship with the international community soured, the governing regime made lavish purchases of a controversial presidential private jet, eight luxury Hummer vehicles, and Mercedes cars and buses that were used for political campaigns. These purchases angered donors and civil society: the UK government, notably, reduced aid by £3m after the jet purchase (Cammack *et al.* 2010). And yet the vehicles became symbolically important in extending patronage to close allies and fostering broader notions of prestige. Patrimonial relationships further included the politicisation of key government appointments, manipulating chiefs, favouring southern Malawians from the president's own Lomwe tribe, and positioning his brother Peter as a potential successor (Cammack 2012). The peculiar mixture of consent and coercion exercised by the Mutharika regime involved fostering consensus through such forms of extraversion, while also being ruthless in the forms of domination visited on anyone opposing the leading group. At the same time, Mutharika sought to articulate a populist vision out of the contradictory and fragmented forms of common sense that existed within Malawi, exploiting, in particular, social anxieties over homosexual behaviour.

Thus, in May 2010, a Malawian gay couple were sentenced to 14 years in prison after being convicted of 'unnatural acts'. Mutharika said 'In all aspects of reasoning, in all aspects of human understanding, these two gay boys were wrong, totally wrong'. Although he pardoned the couple under pressure from the UN, a culture of hate remained (BBC 2010). As Biruk argues 'Mutharika sought to bolster his political legitimacy via manipulation of a notion of "culture"' (2014, 452), he captured public attention and generated discussion by providing

citizens and leading public figures [with] access to a set of terms (homosexuality, gays, gay marriage, gay rights, conditional aid) to be deployed in a novel idiom of social and public commentary, 'African homophobia'. (2014, 451)

Sadgrove *et al.* (2012) construct a situated understanding of the politics of homosexuality in Uganda

that points to the ability to weave a narrative out of popular fears. In a South African context, Hart, drawing in large part on Hunter's (2011) analysis of the gendered politics of social reproduction in the country, demonstrates how Jacob Zuma was able to

connect with and speak to the painful articulations of race, class, gender and sexuality in the everyday lives of many poor black South Africans [thereby] redefining the hegemonic languages of contention. (2013, 205)

Mutharika sought to do the same, drawing on popular fears while weaving a narrative and a language that bolstered a sense of his own moral authority. Gay rights were not the only arena in which Mutharika sought to articulate this specific form of authoritarian populism. In a move that sought to displace criticisms of his own leadership, he went on to call for a return to the 'good old days' of socially conservative attitudes enforced by Hastings Kamuzu Banda, the pre-1994 dictator, introducing new regulations on the media, greater police powers, a new local courts act, as well re-designing the national flag to closely match the imagery of the DPP (Cammack 2012).

Mutharika simultaneously used prestige, coercion and crude forms of populism to exercise power and authority. As human rights violations increased, it was unsurprising that many students and NGOs claimed the country was descending once more into dictatorship (*Africa Confidential* 2011). More broadly, disaffection was growing towards the disastrous economic policies that had generated declining living standards and were threatening food security. What emerged was a tense landscape, with sporadic disputes developing across social, cultural and economic spheres. Depressing manifestations of such a politics of fear and hatred began to occur in places such as markets, where women were attacked for wearing trousers and miniskirts, patterns of dress illegal in Malawi until 1994 but now commonplace. At the same time, violent clashes between informal traders and police occurred over the right to sell in different locations and fights occurred outside petrol stations as motorists awaited fuel.

The deteriorating moral and political situation raised the concerns of the donor community. A cable criticising the government was sent by the British High Commissioner, Fergus Cochrane-Dyet, who claimed Mutharika was 'becoming ever more autocratic and intolerant of criticism' (BBC 2011). When Wikileaks released the cable, in April 2011, the High Commissioner was expelled. His Malawian counterpart was then asked to leave the UK, and the British government withdrew donor funds equivalent to 13.4 per cent of GDP. Following the leak, Mutharika, 'became very angry because he was being feted [framed] as this socialist way with this intolerance of criticism and dissenting voices' (interview 21). Germany also halved

budget support in 2011 (*Africa Confidential* 2011). As the economic situation worsened, the DPP responded by increasing taxes, causing further price rises. On the surface, these policies may appear to be self-defeating for Mutharika; however, while harming the majority and angering the donor community, they strengthened neo-patrimonial and clientelist relationships among the national elite, including the Mulli Brothers, some of Malawi's most prominent business people who gained from government fertiliser contracts. Consensus thereby remained tight among Mutharika's closest allies. At the same time, he was able to knit together a coalition of disparate interests through a seemingly populist stance on 'moral' issues and through offering on-going support from small tobacco producers. Mutharika's 'moral stance' simultaneously enabled suppression of any real sources of opposition and a veneer of popular support, carefully fostered through an attempt to maximise fear of specific social groups. In the midst of economic crisis, cohesion was above all maintained within the national elite as Mutharika had grown the party base and political support through the cabinet, while coercion could be exercised outside on subaltern social groups (Abrahamsen 1997). Furthermore, while the socially regressive policies increasingly soured the relationship with donors, they did not lead to donor retreat. As Gabay argues, the ultimate cause of donors leaving was 'not human rights, but rather politico-economic relationships' (2014, 384). Indeed international opposition to worsening civil rights within the country enabled Mutharika to shift the blame for donor retreat away from his economic policies.

Opposition to Mutharika: protest at Chancellor College

Opposition to Mutharika grew in his second term and the political settlement of 2009 was openly challenged by strikes and protests in 2011 and 2012. An aspiring middle class, frustrated intellectuals, student, and an urban working class began to weave an oppositional narrative. Dissent took 'a triangular shape', made up of three forces: the donors, human rights-focused civil society and opposition politicians (interview 19). As an organic crisis began to develop, news from Egypt and Tunisia simultaneously influenced the political elite's perception of the overall climate (Cammack 2012). Street protests seemed to give weight to their concerns. Thus, in February 2011, the police blocked peaceful protesters over fuel shortages. Mutharika, expressing a growing concern about the events further North in the continent, claimed that protestors were copying those in Tahrir Square (Biruk 2014). Later, protests in mid July 2011 were met by violence orchestrated by the Mutharika regime. Material force is only used by the state to control society on a large scale 'in periods of exceptional crisis' (Femia 1975, 31). Such a moment of

exceptional crisis erupted in protests organised by NGOs around civil rights, donor relations and economic decline in three cities on 20 July 2011. Before the protests, DPP youths drove around the main cities in pick-up trucks carrying pangas (machetes) and intimidating potential demonstrators. On the day of the protests, demonstrators were blocked from protesting by the authorities and 19 people were killed when the police used live bullets (*Africa Confidential* 2011; Gabay 2014). Revolt was suppressed by the coercive apparatus of the ruling party and state, while further violence included what appear to be politically motivated murders and the arrest of a former Attorney General (Lee 2012). The 20 July protest reflected 'a general outcry, but it was mainly initiated by the civil society ... it was just a short period of time where people protested' (interview 14). Following the protest the UN led negotiations with civil society in August and further demonstrations were postponed until 2012.

In parallel to the urban protests, a series of events at Chancellor College contributed to the emergence of a fledgling opposition. These events began when Dr Blessings Chinsinga, Associate Professor of Political Science, compared the Malawian situation and the ongoing social revolution in Tunisia:

[Chinsinga] was giving an example in class, on the revolution and those things like 'the Arab's did this and then that's how the government changes, so we can also do that. As that is how things change most of the time'. So he gave that example in class then after some days he was called by the Inspector General [of Police], Peter Mukhito, who was asking him. 'Why did you give such an example in class? Are you trying to tell the students to protest? Are you against the government?' (Interview 20)

Chinsinga responded to Mukhito by saying that he could not continue teaching because his academic freedom was threatened. The lecturers' union went on to boycott 'unsafe' classrooms in solidarity, while Mutharika accused Chinsinga of 'teaching revolution' (Cammack 2012, 377). Chancellor College became crisis ridden, with demonstrations by staff and students being met by police using live bullets and tear gas. The campus closed on 4 April 2011 and the protest gained national attention, raising the profile of the emerging organic crisis. Nevertheless, even if Malawians became more aware of the government's intolerance of dissent (and interviewees certainly believed that news from Chancellor College popularised dissent), only a small fraction of the population, mainly urban and linked to formal 'civil society' organisations, participated in subsequent protests.

Civil society: what type of 'opposition'?

Educated middle classes made up the majority of this protest movement, both on the streets and inside the

university campus. In this way, the events of 2011 follow a pattern long observed in African civil unrest (Bayart 1993). Particularly prominent were middle-class leaders of formal civil society organisations such as the Malawi Human Rights Commission (MHRC) (interview 5). Civil society organisations therefore become a channel for a specific type of opposition, often linked to international groups and expressed in demands for 'good governance' and 'democratisation'. In Malawi, opposition parties remain fundamentally weak and civil society groups become crucial vectors for a limited opposition, usually lacking any economic vision and remaining focused on questions of civil rights (Cammack 2012). International donors have long promoted civil society in Africa as a key to facilitating a range of multilateral development agendas. 'Civil society' in this sense is co-imbricated with neo-liberal models of governance (Gabay 2011). How civil society organisations operate locally can be unpredictable, but, as part of the apparatus of international development, they tend to represent extensions of historical and imperial forms of governance. Successful prominent civil society organisations typically prioritise an agenda of anti-corruption reform, human rights protection or gender mainstreaming. What angered the particular civil society actors leading the opposition to Mutharika were 'disrespect for human rights, governance problems' (interview 5). Urban-based, elite organisations may genuinely support these issues, but they also, to some extent, perform to an international audience that supplies finance, publicity and acclaim (Gaynor 2011). However there is diversity within civil society organisations, for example on 16 March 2011, 91 civil society organisations hand-delivered a petition condemning threats to human rights activists and Malawi's shift 'into a dictatorship once again' to the office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights in Geneva, but some of the civil society organisations did not oppose the criminalisation of homosexuals, and a few revised their sponsorship of the petition (*Africa Confidential* 2011). If Malawian civil society is diverse, ranging from those who provide resistance to the state and/or donors to those responsible for a consolidation of neoliberal reform, it is predominantly led by elites and often lacks the broad appeal needed through a failure to address material concerns such as access to food and housing.

The supposedly democratising tendency of NGOs cannot, therefore, be taken for granted, and the type of representation they offer in contemporary 'democratic' African societies remains fundamentally limited. Indeed, rather than challenging international development models, Malawian civil society generally provides greater legitimacy to neoliberal forms of governance, thereby reinforcing existing inequalities (Gaynor 2010)

while hindering the potential for more radical or transformative perspectives to gain a voice within an increasingly monopolised 'oppositional politics'. Through detailed exploration of civil society organisations linked to global networks operating in Malawi, Gabay (2011) and Gaynor (2011) have demonstrated how organisations are disciplined by the discursive framings of the MDGs (Millennium Development Goals) and Poverty Strategy Reduction Papers. The attention of these groups comes to be focused on governance, formal government engagement and holding policy makers accountable. Civil society leaders thereby become increasingly dependent on external donors for resources and inspiration, leading to relationships of discipline, restraint and also consent with international neoliberal agendas. Formal civil society organisations have become crucial to the specific form of passive revolution unfolding in Malawi. Bayart (2000, 226) therefore describes the emphasis on 'the fairy story called Democracy' as a contemporary example of Gramsci's reading of 'transformism', something he suggests furthers a kind of 'anti-politics machine'. He continues:

By head-hunting many of the brightest African intellectuals with the high salaries awarded to international civil servants, by celebrating the virtues of 'civil society' and 'good governance' and distributing largesse in the service of this cause, the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund have in effect co-opted and confined those potential counter-elites within a 'legitimate' problematique of development, i.e. the so-called consensus of Washington. In doing so they have done their part to promote a multilateralization of the passive revolution whose principal and political vector is the state. (2000, 226)

The figure who would become so crucial to re-deploying the vector of the state in enacting a second moment in Malawi's passive revolution was Mutharika's own vice president, Joyce Banda; however, in 2011, Banda's moment was yet to come. Indeed, as a vocal critic of Mutharika's second term, she appeared sidelined within the state apparatus. Banda had been a successful businesswoman and leader of the National Business Women Association, rising to prominence as a women's rights and education activist. She entered parliament in 1999 and became foreign minister in 2006, later receiving wide international praise through maintaining close relationships with the donor community and becoming a key supporter of the Millennium Development Goals (Harland Scott 2013). It was somewhat surprising that Banda was selected as Mutharika's vice president in 2009; however, the appointment enabled the latter to appease donors in the run-up to the election. When Mutharika's policies shifted in his second term, Banda nevertheless became politically isolated. By 2011, she had little political influence, later going on to form her own People's Party

(PP) (Dionne and Dulani 2013). With Banda sidelined and the constitution only allowing for a president to serve two terms, it was Mutharika's brother, Peter, who was now positioned as the most likely successor. As the economic crisis rumbled on in 2011, frustrations grew: Mutharika's response was a cabinet reshuffle, but no significant change in policy. Instead, attempts were made to weaken and divide the dissenting voices within formal civil society groups through offers of jobs and scholarships, backed up by intimidation and police harassment. At Chancellor College the dispute with the lectures lasted until an uneasy settlement in November 2011.

Mutharika's heart attack

In the midst of the crisis an unexpected event occurred: Bingu wa Mutharika suddenly died of a heart attack on 5 April 2012. When news reached Chancellor College, 'most of the students celebrated' (interview 5). As one interviewee commented, 'I thought it right to say "he's gone please somebody come in so we can see a change"' (interview 12). Celebrations were tempered by confusion with 'no actual report from the hospital that Bingu had died' (interview 17). Peter Mutharika then tried to illegally seize power, but the constitution was upheld and Joyce Banda became southern Africa's first female president. The adherence to legal process was widely praised and Banda soon began to win international accolades while restoring Malawi's reputation on the world stage. In this second moment of Malawi's passive revolution, Banda steered the country from authoritarian nationalism to a collaborative relationship with the external environment. Her first steps in office involved improving the context for international capital by inviting tobacco managers back and opening negotiations with the IMF. Banda then began addressing human rights concerns by appointing a new Inspector General of Police and a new head of the state media, as well as restoring the design of the national flag. In moves calculated to appease the international community, she subsequently called for the arrest of Sudanese president Omar Al-Bashir if he attended the African Union Summit in Malawi. Later, in a further act of appeasement, Banda reportedly sold the fleet of 60 Mercedes and the private presidential jet, although the ownership of the jet remained unclear. International acclaim followed: Banda was recognised as *Forbes* magazine's most powerful woman in Africa, one of *Time* magazine's 100 most influential people in the world, and she received an honorary doctorate in economics from the University of Jeonju, South Korea, as well as gaining praise from David Cameron, Hillary Clinton and Barack Obama. Ultimately, however, as with Mutharika's previous isolation, it was economic policy rather than personal leadership that was most

important in determining Malawi's relationship with the West. As Gabay records

it is notable that donors, under the auspices of IMF negotiation, only reinstated funds to Malawi once Joyce Banda agreed to devalue the Kwacha upon ascending to the presidency. (2014, 376)

At Chancellor College some were highly critical and believed Banda was a handmaiden to foreign influence. She appeared 'to be a puppet of the west, or to be a puppet of the IMF' and interviewee 22 continued

At the time she was talking about the gay rights, many people in Malawi are saying 'no we don't want it', but she said 'no' and because she wanted to get the donor money, she said 'we are going to implement this'.

Importantly, Banda broke from some of the languages of hegemony fostered by Mutharika who claimed shared cultural and moral values within the criminalising of homosexuality. At the same time, in enacting this break – passive revolution through the form of the state – Banda appeared to lack the 'vision' and popular legitimacy of her predecessor (interview 22). Mutharika's dubious moral claims had served to neutralise popular antagonisms. Banda did not make the same efforts, instead seeking to lead through the legitimacy offered by formal civil society organisations and the international community. At the same time, and somewhat paradoxically, Banda drew upon support from the same dominant group as Mutharika. In the words of one, she had 'taken [the] same old politicians and put them into key positions. You see the same people but changing their colours, being a jackal to a wolf and so forth' (interview 22), leading to a restoration of the neo-patrimonial relationships between the dominant class and the external environment, more characteristic of Mutharika's first term in office (Cammack *et al.* 2010). Extraversion as a form of passive revolution for the post-colonial state was thereby renewed. This meant that 'in terms of following what the West wants she has done very well' (interviewee 25). Indeed the Banda government restored the nation to a position where it was more favourably aligned with international capital. Banda's interventions and leadership of the dominant group can be viewed as a counter revolutionary move, steering the nation away from crisis and embracing the political rule of capital. As has been demonstrated in research into civil society organisations in Malawi (Gabay 2011; Gaynor 2011), Banda was part of the apparatus of a liberal model for international development. A disparity emerged between her positive international image and local frustration:

to the whites, that's to say people from UK, she's popular there ... On the other hand for us, being Malawian, it is not

good and she is not popular at the moment because of the devaluation she did. (Interview 18)

The impact of devaluation

Soon after gaining power, Banda devalued the Kwacha by 50 per cent and floated the currency, a move praised by the international community. Christine Lagarde, Managing Director of the IMF, visited Malawi in early 2013 and congratulated the President for her bold economic policies and the liberalisation of the foreign exchange market. The returned British High Commissioner Michael Nevin confidently stated: 'There are sound macroeconomic policies that the country is using which will result in economic recovery' (Kachali 2013). The devaluation improved the business environment for firms operating transnationally, assisting the export of tobacco in particular (*Malawi Today* 2012). However, as one interviewee noted, the devaluation was 'devastating' for the poor (interview 3). Steep increases in the price of basic goods pushed many Malawians deeper into poverty (CfSC 2012). Indeed the intervention in many ways mirrored the shock treatments imposed in the 1970s and 80s as part of Structural Adjustment Programmes across the developing world, a process that had horrific social impacts while benefitting international capital in the form of transnational corporations (Abrahamsen 1997; Morton 2003). Rather than a managed transition, 'everything has hiked up, things which were costing 200 kwacha are now costing 500 kwacha' (interview 3) and there were 'no government policies as to how they would protect the poor' (interview 1). The devaluation especially hit the urban poor, who faced a 38.5 per cent increase in food prices, according to the National Statistical Office (*Malawi Voice* 2013).

While the impacts on livelihoods were devastating in the short term, research participants noted that the policies would bring improvements for some interest groups, including the Consumer Association of Malawi, who welcomed the devaluation. The Governor of the Reserve Bank of Malawi, Charles Chuka, argued it would bring inward investment and enable the IMF to signal an 'all clear to all Malawi's cooperating partners that it was safe to do business with Malawi' (*New People* 2012, 35). Joyce Banda also actively sought new investment, inviting the British private sector to come and invest in the country when visiting business leaders in London. Specific new government measures included deregulating the private sector, creating new investment opportunities in areas such as electricity generation and mining, eliminating price controls, and terminating import restrictions and import licences. Liberal economic policies ensured support from groups aligned with international capital, but also fostered some broader support among university staff and

students at Chancellor College who favoured the dominant development model. Although they all observed that high inflation hit the poor and salaried workers, the availability of foreign exchange and fuel curtailed the burgeoning black market and facilitated transport. For some the reforms were welcome: 'from an economics point of view I think it was a good thing' (interview 8). Another interviewee noted 'we now have those non-governmental organisations like UNICEF back' (interview 9). If some within the country therefore joined the international community in welcoming Banda's revolution/restoration, the restored engagement with the external environment also led some to be deeply critical of the new relationships:

The donor community requires free trade . . . [and] requires the removal of subsidies, you know as a developing country there must be a [fertiliser] subsidy programme in order to help those that cannot afford . . . It [the donor community] encourages privatization so many people are leaving from their jobs and are just roaming around . . . We are not competitive enough to compete on the open market. (Interview 22)

The restoration of close relationships between the international community and the government was stabilising 'aspects which the World Bank and IMF like to see stabilised and destabilised the aspects that Malawians like to see stabilised' (interview 26). Therefore there was a mixed perception of Joyce Banda's presidency, but what was clear was that Malawi was not in the same state of organic crisis and the conditions that had led to violent discontent and protest in 2011 were not present in 2012.

Passive revolution in Malawi

It is important to consider the continuities and changes between the leadership of the two presidents. The tenuous legitimacy of Mutharika's Presidency drew from a disparate group of supporters. As well as support from a domestic political elite that benefited from the extraversion of Mutharika's first term, the latter bolstered his unravelling hegemony in the second term through an attempt to neuter developing antagonisms by displacing them onto popular moral concerns. Although clearly contradicted by his first term in office, Mutharika developed a language of nationalism and autonomy that appeared to be opposed to the policy prescriptions of the international financial institutions. In contrast, Banda quickly surrendered the initiative to transform Malawi, which could have built on and given voice to the fledgling opposition that emerged in 2011, and, instead, reverted back to a form of extraversion, working to gain support primarily from international donors, but also the army, neighbouring states and key parts of civil society (Gabay 2014). As we argued at the outset, the revolution/restoration that

marks the transition from Mutharika to Banda can be understood as a moment within the passive revolution that has been enacted over the postcolonial period within Malawi. Rather than revolution, the new, or reformed, dominant group within the state moved from an autocratic, national and inward-looking approach to capitalism, to a benign pro-market version championed by the international community. The transition from Mutharika to Banda represents a reorganisation of capitalism during a period of state crisis, bolstered by the continuing rise of neoliberalism through structural change. In this sense it charts a similar path to forms of passive revolution in the global South mapped by Morton (2003). Transformation came from 'on-high' and occurred without mass participation. Simultaneously, the support Banda received from formal civil society and the donor community represents the 'multilateralization of passive revolution' indicated by Bayart (2000, 226).

During periods of passive revolution change occurs as the dominant class reacts to the 'sporadic and incoherent rebelliousness of the popular masses' by agreeing to some of these demands, or at least appearing to do so (Morton 2010, 318), while simultaneously neutralising its power base through forms of transformism. Thus, Banda's presidency represented a popular return to the rule of law and she initially received a warm welcome for her implementation of reforms that appeased civil society organisations. Prominent leaders of civil society organisations praised the ways in which her policies met their demands, including the restored diplomatic and international relations and the resumption of aid; enhanced human rights; an improved separation of power between the executive, parliament and judiciary; a more inclusive and less nepotistic approach to appointing key government and parastatal officials; and an opening up of political space for community service organisations (Trapence *et al.* 2012). Although these leaders were not without their concerns around media freedom, security and corruption.¹ Banda also made important symbolic gestures, using the language and rhetoric of poverty reduction while reforming the political settlement. Overall, the state selectively met demands from civil society, reproducing new forms of social relations through two processes: state-led initiatives in the form of devaluation that restored a liberal capitalist system of accumulation and an assimilation of demands from civil society organisations without any real shift in power relations. For Gabay the period demonstrates 'a largely continuous political economy which problematizes the notion that what has occurred in Malawi can be called a "transition"' (2014, 375). Interviewees at Chancellor College confirm this sense that the country is 'slipping back to how things are routinely done' (interview 25). Nevertheless, if continuity represents one aspect to Malawi's passive revolution,

it can also be read as a move to a new 'capitalist trajectory'. It is impossible to separate the revolution/restoration of domestic political relations within Malawi from the global political economy within which this change-without-change has occurred. Banda's compromise with international capital echoes earlier instances of an unfolding passive revolution across the continent. Fatton's analysis of the Senegalese passive revolution therefore describes a situation similar to Malawi in which

the IMF-inspired plan of austerity has reinforced social inequalities and failed to confront those dominant political forces which have a vested interest in the preservation of the status quo. (1986, 748)

Joyce Banda's passive revolution went further and did not just lead to the stabilisation of class interests, but opened the economy to international investment, not just from the West, but also from China and other emerging economies. Through the combination of organic crisis and the chance circumstance of Mutharika's heart attack, change became possible. Nevertheless, wrought through the dominant class, the changes ushered in were consonant with global neoliberalism (Morton 2003). It was a consistent observation that the reforms introduced by Banda had improved the economic situation for the affluent and would lead to a widening gap between rich and poor.

Those that are poor become poorer, those that are rich become richer. Those that are top officials in Malawi ... they are really enjoying [themselves]. (Interview 12)

Political capital and membership of the dominant group was seen as being key to prosperity: 'For those in politics, not just in the government, but politics, I think they are making it [money] and it's sad' (interview 13).

Conclusion

In Bayart's (1993 2000) terms, a process of extraversion first enabled Mutharika to actively foster a series of unequal relationships with the international community to the benefit of himself and his closest allies within the country. Subsequently, the changes wrought through the Malawian state by Banda's regime are an example of change without mass participation and thus a 'revolution from above'. The absence of a popular voice is analogous to the lack of mass popular engagement in the development of modern Italy. Such a moment could have provided a window of opportunity for a radical renegotiation of the political settlement but instead what occurred was the restoration of the political rule of capital 'lacking a radical national-popular "Jacobin" moment' (Morton 2010, 317). Confined within what Bayart (2000, 226) refers to as a "legitimate" problematique of development' articulated by her allies within the international financial institutions, Banda enabled a deepening of neo-patrimonial relations at the

same time as breaking with them. Fledgling opposition to such a strategy of extraversion from local civil servants and the domestically educated, like those at Chancellor College, are subsequently marginalised. Aiming to create a modern, outward-looking liberal state, Banda and her international allies, to quote Gramsci on the failures to produce a modern Italian state, 'produced a bastard' (Q19, §28; 1971, 90).

In situations such as Mutharika's second term, when protest movements develop without the Jacobin element necessary for revolutionary transformation, they fail to effect progressive transformation. Change occurs instead through a strengthening of the state and a neutralising of dissent through processes of transformism. Passive revolution is here conceived as an active political strategy, similar to that Gramsci saw having unfolded after the 1848 revolutions and after the Paris Commune in 1871. However, in its contemporary manifestation it involves a re-actualisation of dominant relations of force through neoliberalism and 'good governance'. Joyce Banda was largely responsible for effecting this second moment in Malawi's passive revolution. In contrast, enabling progressive change in Malawi would mean producing a fundamentally differently 'political' (Thomas 2009b), through building on the rational kernel of good sense within the fragmented and contradictory understandings of common sense among Malawi's subaltern groups. Articulating this good sense requires a coherence that challenges the passivity often generated by common sense, and a 'cathartic moment' through which subaltern groups might move from disparate sets of interests into a world-changing movement. No such coalition of interests is currently emerging in Malawi; this was readily apparent from the interviews. However, the interviews also suggest the possibility for articulating a somewhat different vision of Malawi's future that might break from the ongoing nightmare of passive revolution.

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Note

- 1 Joyce Banda was later embroiled in the 'cashgate' corruption scandal that lies beyond the scope of this paper.

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